NATIONAL STRATEGY

FOR

COMBATING TERRORISM

Today's Terrorist Enemy

The United States and our partners continue to pursue a significantly degraded but still dangerous al-Qaida network. Yet the enemy we face today in the War on Terror is not the same enemy we faced on September 11. Our effective counterterrorist efforts, in part, have forced the terrorists to evolve and modify their ways of doing business. Our understanding of the enemy has evolved as well. Today, the principal terrorist enemy confronting the United States is a transnational movement of extremist organizations, networks, and individuals – and their state and non-state supporters – which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends.

This transnational movement is not monolithic. Although al-Qaida functions as the movement's vanguard and remains, along with its affiliate groups and those inspired by them, the most dangerous present manifestation of the enemy, the movement is not controlled by any single individual, group, or state. What unites the movement is a common vision, a common set of ideas about the nature and destiny of the world, and a common goal of ushering in totalitarian rule. What unites the movement is the ideology of oppression, violence, and hate.

Our terrorist enemies exploit Islam to serve a violent political vision. Fueled by a radical ideology and a false belief that the United States is the cause of most problems affecting Muslims today, our enemies seek to expel Western power and influence from the Muslim world and establish regimes that rule according to a violent and intolerant distortion of Islam. As illustrated by Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, such regimes would deny all political and religious freedoms and serve as sanctuaries for extremists to launch additional attacks against not only the United States, its allies and partners, but the Muslim world itself. Some among the enemy, particularly al-Qaida, harbor even greater territorial and geopolitical ambitions and aim to establish a single, pan-Islamic, totalitarian regime that stretches from Spain to Southeast Asia.

This enemy movement seeks to create and exploit a division between the Muslim and non-Muslim world and within the Muslim world itself. The terrorists distort the idea of jihad into a call for violence and murder against those they regard as apostates or unbelievers, including all those who disagree with them. Most of the terrorist attacks since September 11 have occurred in Muslim countries – and most of the victims have been Muslims.

In addition to this principal enemy, a host of other groups and individuals also use terror and violence against innocent civilians to pursue their political objectives. Though their motives and goals may be different, and often include secular and more narrow territorial aims, they threaten our interests and those of our partners as they attempt to overthrow civil order and replace freedom with conflict and intolerance. Their terrorist tactics ensure that they are enemies of humanity regardless of their goals and no matter where they operate.

For our terrorist enemies, violence is not only justified, it is necessary and even glorified – judged the only means to achieve a world vision darkened by hate, fear, and oppression. They use suicide bombings, beheadings, and other atrocities against innocent people as a means to promote their creed. Our enemy's demonstrated indifference to human life and desire to inflict catastrophic damage on the United States and its friends and allies around the world have fueled their desire for

weapons of mass destruction. We cannot permit the world's most dangerous terrorists and their regime sponsors to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.

For the enemy, there is no peaceful coexistence with those who do not subscribe to their distorted and violent view of the world. They accept no dissent and tolerate no alternative points of view. Ultimately, the terrorist enemy we face threatens global peace, international security and prosperity, the rising tide of democracy, and the right of all people to live without fear of indiscriminate violence.